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The new normal is catastrophe: fracking, drilling, warming, sovereign debt, inequality, hyper-consumption – an accelerating vortex underpinned by the mnemotechnics of modernity, a cognitive complex even theory cannot escape. Thought must begin from the death of thought – a break with the eco-oikonomics of philosophy that underpins memetic regimes of dominance

Cohen 12 (Tom Cohen, Professor of Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies at University at Albany, State University of New York, Ph.D., from Yale University, 2012, “Introduction: Murmurations—“Climate Change” and the Defacement of Theory” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001)

The point is, today everyone can see that the system is deeply unjust and careening out of control. Unfettered greed has trashed the global economy. And we are trashing the natural world. We are overfishing our oceans, polluting our water with fracking and deepwater drilling, turning to the dirtiest forms of energy on the planet, like the Alberta tar sands. The atmosphere can’t absorb the amount of carbon we are putting into it, creating dangerous warming. The new normal is serial disasters: economic and ecological. —Naomi Klein, “The fight against climate change is down to us—the 99%” [2011] Carbon pollution and over-use of Earth’s natural resources have become so critical that, on current trends, we will need a second planet to meet our needs by 2030, the WWF said on Wednesday. —Agence France-Presse, “Time to find a second Earth, WWF says” [2010] 1. Warnings regarding the planet earth’s imminent depletion of reserves or “life as we know it” arrive today more as routine tweets than events that might give us pause, particularly as the current wars over global “sovereign debt” and economic “crises” swamp attention. The intensifying specter of megadebt—at a time of “peak everything” (peak water, peak oil, peak humans)—dumped into a future despoiled of reserves and earning capacity has a specific relation to this white-out—the “economical” and “ecological” tandem shifts all attention to the first term (or first “eco”). In a post-global present consolidating what is routinely remarked as a neo-feudal order, the titanic shift of hyperwealth to the corporatist few (the so-called 1 %) sets the stage for a shift to control societies anticipating social disruption and the implications of “Occupy” style eruptions—concerning which the U.S. congress hastily passed new unconstitutional rules to apprehend citizens or take down websites. The Ponzi scheme logics of twenty-first century earthscapes portray an array of time-bubbles, catastrophic deferrals, telecratic capture, and a voracious present that seems to practice a sort of tempophagy on itself corresponding with its structural premise of hyper-consumption and perpetual “growth. The supposed urgencies of threatened economic and monetary “collapse” occlude and defer any attention to the imperatives of the biosphere, but this apparent pause or deferral of attention covers over an irreversible mutation. A new phase of unsustainability appears in which a faux status quo ante appears to will to sustain itself as long as possible and at whatever cost; the event of the twenty-first century is that there will be no event, that no crisis will disturb the expansion of consumption beyond all supposed limits or peaks. In such an environment other materialities emerge, reference systems default, and the legacies of anthropo-narcissm go into overdrive in mechanical ways. Supposedly advanced or post-theory theory is no exception—claiming on the one hand ever more verdant comings together of redemptive communities, and discretely restoring many phenomenological tropes that 20th century thought had displaced. This has been characterized as an unfolding eco-eco disaster—a complex at once economic and ecological. [1] The logics of the double oikos appear, today, caught in a self-feeding default. The present volume, in diverse ways, reclaims a certain violence that has seemed occluded or anaesthetized (it is a “present,” after all, palpably beyond “tipping points” yet shy of their fully arrived implications—hence the pop proliferation of “zombie” metaphors: zombie banks, zombie politics, zombie “theory”). It departs from a problem inherent in the “eco” as a metaphoric complex, that of the home (oikos), and the suicidal fashion in which this supposed proper ground recuperates itself from a non-existent position. The figure of an ecology that is ours and that must be saved precludes us from confronting the displacement and dispossession which conditions all production, including the production of homelands. Memory regimes have insistently, silently and anonymously prolonged and defended the construct of “homeland security” (both in its political sense, and in the epistemological sense of being secure in our modes of cognition), but these systems of security have in fact accelerated the vortices of ecocatastrophic imaginaries. This leads to what can be called the zone of telemorphosis: that is, how and whether conceptual practices and cognitive rituals, including those of critical theory, have participated in the production of these horizons, and what, today, breaks with that. If a double logic of eco-eco disaster overlaps with the epoch in deep time geologists now refer to as the “anthropocene,” what critical re-orientations, today, contest what has been characterized as a collective blind or psychotic foreclosure? Nor can one place the blame at the feet alone of an accidental and evil ‘1%’ of corporate culture alone, since an old style revolutionary model does not emerge from this exitless network of systems. More interesting is the way that ‘theory’, with its nostalgic agendas for a properly political world of genuine praxis or feeling has been complicit in its fashion. How might one read the implicit, unseen collaboration that critical agendas coming out of twentieth century master-texts unwittingly maintained with the accelerated trajectories in question? The mesmerizing fixation with cultural histories, the ethics of “others,” the enhancement of subjectivities, “human rights” and institutions of power not only partook of this occlusion but ‘we theorists’ have deferred addressing biospheric collapse, mass extinction events, or the implications of resource wars and “population” culling. It is our sense of justified propriety—our defense of cultures, affects, bodies and others—that allows us to remain secure in our homeland, unaware of all the ruses that maintain that spurious home.

This is particularly true of climate change – traditional notions of subjectivity operationalize a mnemotechnics that make shared imaginaries impossible. This is telemorphosis: regimes of memory that pave the way toward extinction

Cohen 12 (Tom Cohen, Professor of Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies at University at Albany, State University of New York, Ph.D., from Yale University, 2012, “Introduction: Murmurations—“Climate Change” and the Defacement of Theory” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001)

If it is possible to note that theory’s retrieval of human and animal otherness against the horrors of capitalism is akin to political deferrals of the future for the sake of saving the present, then we might ask what might open the reactive self-bound logics beyond homeland security? What has been absent to date is any shared or possible climate change imaginary—or a critical matrix. The problem is that the other materialities that constitute the forces of climate change would pulverize whatever informs “imaginaries” in general, which have always been tropological systems. When a recent critical query asks, for example, how to define “a political subject of climate change” the authors focus on how the “climate crisis shapes particular subjectivities,” properly putting any rhetoric of “crisis” itself to the side as appropriable. The problem lies in the premise of defining a “political subject” or subjectivities to begin with: “Unsurprisingly, much of the current discourse on climate change oscillates between these two poles: most dramatically, between imminent catastrophe and the prospect of renewal; between unimaginable humanitarian disaster and the promise of a green-tech revolution. As such the climate crisis regularly calls forth regimes of risk” [Dibley and Neilson 2010: 144]. This Janus-faced algorithm, the “political subject of climate change” (147), arrives as a form of cognitive disjuncture: “these two images… are alternative figures of the subjectivity of ecological crisis. They are complimentary… . something like a dialectical image of the subjectivity of climate change” (146). On the one hand, this theoretical intervention is typical of the cognitive reflex toward pre-emption of the worst in arguments focused on mitigation, on sustainability, and on various “environmental” agendas—despite none of these answering to what science would demand. Sustainability has been angled to “sustain” the level of comfort and acquisition that the economy of “growth” demands. On the other hand, there is a reflex of occlusion. This straining for a “subjectivity” that would account for a political feature of this new landscape comes up with two mutually canceling algorithms: a desperate sense of imminent crisis and end, alongside a hope of something as lulling as ‘subjectivity’. As a number of essays in the volume imply, one might proceed otherwise: depart or begin from a subject without subjectivity (Catherine Malabou), or an exteriority without interior (Justin Read). The aporia of an era of climate change are structurally different from those that devolved on the torsions of Western metaphysics. They are not the aporia explored by Derrida around the figure of hospitality, taken as an endless refolding that keeps in place, while exposing, a perpetuated and lingering logics that defers the inhospitable. (One mode of deconstruction as solicitation involves shaking the house or structure within which one finds oneself, and this circuit might itself be disturbed by a refusal to occupy.) As Masao Myoshi [2001] first suggested, the logics of extinction compromise the aims of an emancipatory future along with all else. Any project of “formal democracy” runs up not only against the twenty-first century post-democratic telecracies that render that episode of 90’s thought transparently inscribed in the neo-liberal fantasy (or propaganda) it would appropriate back for the then bruised “Left.” But it also faces the transparency by which market democracy not only appears a Potemkin figure itself but, in fact, guarantees planetary ruin by the demographic requirements of cars alone for any emerging middle class of India and China (as Arundhati Roy argues). [4] Any focus on global population control runs up against feminist progressivism [Hedges 2009; Hartman 2009]; post-colonial narratives that would restoratively mime the promise of 90’s neo-liberalism of a world of market democracy would require three planets of resource materiel to allow dispossessed others to reach our levels of prosperity. The profound 90’s investment in the “otherness of the other,” an other who would be recognized, communed with, raised into the polis, and colonized, appears today as a stubborn archaism and, perhaps, as an epochal error, that maintained the sovereign trace of subjective mastery. It would seem that both metaphysics and its deconstruction jointly participated in what is now disclosing itself as the “anthropocene”—an epoch of self-affirmation into which Enlightenment ideologemes have played, as Dipesh Chakrabarty analyzes in the term “freedom.” [5] The impasse between today’s spellbound and rapacious present and supposed future generations, the rupture of any imagined moral contract to or recognition of same, has been in circulation for a while. The present volume of essays focuses on this under-examined question: how do mnemotechics, conceptual regimes, and reading—a certain unbounded textualization that exceeds any determination of writing—participate in or accelerate the mutations that extend, today, from financial systems to the biosphere? The volume gives this a name, telemorphosis.

The call to return to the autonomous human subject as the locus of our agency participates in this telemorphosis – ecocatastrophe exceeds our ideas of scale and time, collapsing the received notions of rationality

Clark 12 (Timothy Clark is Professor of English at the University of Durham, 2012, “Scale” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001>)

Introduction: Scale Effects You are lost in a small town, late for a vital appointment somewhere in its streets. You stop a friendly-looking stranger and ask the way. Generously, he offers to give you a small map which he happens to have in his briefcase. The whole town is there, he says. You thank him and walk on, opening the map to pinpoint a route. It turns out to be a map of the whole earth. The wrong scale. A scale (from the Latin scala for ladder, step or stairs) usually enables a calibrated and useful extrapolation between dimensions of space or time. Thus a “cartographic scale” describes the ratio of distance on a map to real distances on the earth’s surface. To move from a large to small scale or vice versa implies a calculable shift of resolution on the same area or features, a smooth zooming out or in. With climate change, however, we have a map, its scale includes the whole earth but when it comes to relating the threat to daily questions of politics, ethics or specific interpretations of history, culture, literature, etc., the map is often almost mockingly useless. Policies and concepts relating to climate change invariably seem undermined or even derided by considerations of scale: a campaign for environmental reform in one country may be already effectively negated by the lack of such measures on the other side of the world. A long fought-for nature reserve, designed to protect a rare ecosystem, becomes, zooming out, a different place. Even the climatology works on a less than helpful scale: “Paradoxically, it is simpler to predict what will happen to the planet, a closed system, than to make forecasts for specific regions” (Litfin 137). Cartographic scale is itself an inadequate concept here. Non-cartographic concepts of scale are not a smooth zooming in and out but involve jumps and discontinuities with sometimes incalculable “scale effects.” For instance: In the engineering sciences, scale effects are those that result from size differences between a model and the real system. Even though a miniature model of a building made of wood is structurally sound, it is not necessarily appropriate to infer that the same process maintaining structural stability could hold for a full-size building made of wood. (Jenerette and Wu 104) To give another instance, a map of the whole earth, at a “small” scale in cartographic terms, is at an enormous scale ecologically, one at which other non-linear scale effects become decisive and sometimes incalculable. Garrett Hardin writes: Many stupid actions taken by society could be avoided if more people were acutely aware of scale effects. Whenever the scale is shifted upward, one should always be alert for possible contradictions of the conventional wisdom that served so well when the unit was smaller…. Failure of the electorate to appreciate scale effects can put the survival of a democratic nation in jeopardy. (52) Some thinkers less controversial than Hardin draw on complexity theory to suggest the necessary emergence of scale effects with merely the increasing complexity of globalizing civilization: “once a society develops beyond a certain level of complexity it becomes increasingly fragile. Eventually it reaches a point at which even a relatively minor disturbance can bring everything crashing down” (MacKenzie 33). For others, the environmental crisis is in part caused by the effects of conflicting scales in the government of human affairs. Jim Dator writes: Environmental, economic, technological and health factors are global, but our governance systems are still based on the nation state, while our economic system (‘free market’ capitalism) and many national political systems (interest group ‘democracy’) remain profoundly individualistic in input, albeit tragically collective in output (215–6). Scale effects in relation to climate change are confusing because they take the easy, daily equations of moral and political accounting and drop into them both a zero and an infinity: the greater the number of people engaged in modern forms of consumption then the less the relative influence or responsibility of each but the worse the cumulative impact of their insignificance. As a result of scale effects what is self-evident or rational at one scale may well be destructive or unjust at another. Hence, progressive social and economic policies designed to disseminate Western levels of prosperity may even resemble, on another scale, an insane plan to destroy the biosphere. Yet, for any individual household, motorist, etc., a scale effect in their actions is invisible. It is not present in any phenomenon in itself (no eidetic reduction will flush it out), but only in the contingency of how many other such phenomena there are, have been and will be, at even vast distances in space or time. Human agency becomes, as it were, displaced from within by its own act, a kind of demonic iterability. The argument of this paper is that dominant modes of literary and cultural criticism are blind to scale effects in ways that now need to be addressed. Derangements of Scale One symptom of a now widespread crisis of scale is a derangement of linguistic and intellectual proportion in the way people often talk about the environment, a breakdown of “decorum” in the strict sense. Thus a sentence about the possible collapse of civilization can end, no less solemnly, with the injunction never to fill the kettle more than necessary when making tea. A poster in many workplaces depicts the whole earth as giant thermostat dial, with the absurd but intelligible caption “You control climate change.” A motorist buying a slightly less destructive make of car is now “saving the planet.” These deranged jumps in scale and fantasies of agency may recall rhetoric associated with the atomic bomb in the 1950s and after. Maurice Blanchot argued then that talk of humanity having power over the whole earth, or being able to “destroy itself,” was deeply misleading. “Humanity” is not some grand mega-subject or unitary agent in the sense this trope implies. In practice such destruction would certainly not be some sort of consciously performed act of self-harm, “humanity destroying itself.” It would be as arbitrary as was “the turtle that fell from the sky” and crushed the head of Aeschylus (Blanchot 106). The almost nonsensical rhetoric of environmental slogans makes Blanchot’s point even more forcefully. Received concepts of agency, rationality and responsibility are being strained or even begin to fall apart in a bewildering generalizing of the political that can make even filling a kettle as public an act as voting. The very notion of a “carbon footprint” alters the distinctions of public and private built into the foundations of the modern liberal state. Normally, demands in a political context to face the future take the form of some rousing call to regained authenticity, whether personal, cultural or national, and they reinforce given norms of morality or responsibility, with an enhanced sense of determination and purpose. With climate change this is not the case. Here a barely calculable nonhuman agency brings about a general but unfocused sense of delegitimation and uncertainty, a confusion of previously clear arenas of action or concepts of equity; boundaries between the scientific and the political become newly uncertain, the distinction between the state and civil society less clear, and once normal procedures and modes of understanding begin to resemble dubious modes of political, ethical and intellectual containment. Even a great deal of environmental criticism, modeling itself on kinds of progressive oppositional politics and trying (like Murray Bookchin’s “social ecology”) to explain environmental degradation by reference solely to human-to-human hierarchies and oppressions can look like an evasion of the need to accord to the nonhuman a disconcerting agency of its own. The environmental crisis also questions given boundaries between intellectual disciplines. The daily news confirms repeatedly the impossibility of reducing many environmental issues to any one coherent problem, dysfunction, or injustice. Overpopulation and atmospheric pollution, for instance, form social, moral, political, medical, technical, ethical and “animal rights” issues, all at once. If that tired term “the environment” has often seemed too vague—for it means, ultimately, “everything”—yet the difficulty of conceptualizing a politics of climate change may be precisely that of having to think “everything at once”. The overall force is of an implosion of scales, implicating seemingly trivial or small actions with enormous stakes while intellectual boundaries and lines of demarcation fold in upon each other. The inundation of received intellectual boundaries and the horror of many probable future scenarios has the deranging effect, for instance, of making deeply unsure which of the following two statements is finally the more responsible—(1) “climate change is now acknowledged as a legitimate and serious concern and the government will continue to support measures to improve the fuel efficiency of motor vehicles” or (2) “the only defensible relationship to have with a car is with a well aimed brick”? [1]

This is the death of theory – policy solutions toward climate change render thought into calculus, inserting eco-catastrophe within an economy of crisis management

Before even thinking the question of a new energy source, we must first ask the question: what is the self?

McQuillan 12 (Martin McQuillan, Professor of Literary Theory and Cultural Analysis at Kingston University, 2012, “Notes Toward a Post-Carbon Philosophy” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001>)

This is an essay about philosophy, its task and object, after the end of a carbon economy. This topic is not wild science fiction; according to most estimates we (collectively as a planet) have reached or surpassed the moment of peak oil (the point at which world reserves begin to dwindle). Effectively the post-carbon epoch has already begun, since it is now a task of the critical imagination to envisage a world beyond the fractal distillation of petroleum. The task of thinking a post-carbon world also revolves around the difficulty of thinking ‘a world’ at this moment, that is to say, a world made global by what we have been taught to term mondelization or more strictly mondelatinization (a globalization based on western hegemony and privilege). [1] The place of philosophy, as a western model of thought, is no doubt vexed in this situation, given that all of the terms of globalization such as “economy,” “law,” “sovereignty,” “world,” and so on are all philosophical terms and are all metaphysical through and through. However, given where this task of thinking is beginning from and the resources it has to hand we will have to pick up the philosophical heritage that confronts us and come to terms with the obvious and inevitable difficulty of becoming part of the history of the object that one wishes to describe through this philosophical vocabulary. If it is true that we are entering an epoch of new materialities for which we as yet have no descriptive framework then philosophy must respond to this situation. The question of matter after all is also a philosophical concept. The empirical and all empiricisms are, as Derrida notes as early as “Violence and Metaphysics,” philosophical gestures that embed themselves within the history of philosophy. His reading of Levinas in this essay is to suggest the ways in which Levinas demonstrates that all empiricism is metaphysical, and a constant philosophical thematization “of the infinite exteriority of the other.” Levinas in contrast understands the empirical not as a positivism but as an experience of difference and of the other. “Empiricism,” claims Derrida, “always has been determined by philosophy, from Plato to Husserl as nonphilosophy: as the philosophical pretention to nonphilosophy” (152). That is as philosophy’s way of affecting to speak in a non-philosophical way. However, nothing can more profoundly conjure the need for philosophy than this denial of philosophy by philosophy. Within the metaphysical schema that is nonphilosophy, the irruption of the wholly other solicits philosophy (i.e. the logos) as its own origin, end, and other. There is no escape from philosophy as far as empiricism is concerned; there will only ever be a thinking about the empirical that is philosophical. It is this radicalization of empiricism that deconstruction proposes as a breathless, inspiring journey for philosophy in the later years of the twentieth century; as Derrida states in the opening paragraphs of the essay on Levinas, it is the closure of philosophy by nonphilosophy that gives thought a future: “it may even be that these questions are not philosophical, are not philosophy’s questions. Nevertheless, these should be the only questions today capable of founding the community, within the world, of those who are still called philosophers; and called such in remembrance, at very least, of the fact that these questions must be examined unrelentingly” (79). So, the question of the materiality of a post-carbon economy may not be a question that philosophy has the resources to answer but which must nevertheless be thought about and so determined in a philosophical manner. It may be the case that long before peak oil we reached the point of peak philosophy, with Hegel or Marx, Nietzsche, or Heidegger and what remains is a post-philosophical speculative economy, which in some necessary way sits on considerable philosophical and metaphysical reserves. This thought will be of use to us in the coming pages; just as I am at pains in this opening paragraph to point out that one cannot seek to swap climate change denial for the denial of philosophy. It will then be difficult to imagine the new materialities of the age of climate change without philosophy and in fact the persistent theme of matter in the discourse on environmentalism will undoubtedly compel us towards philosophy. It may be the case that philosophy will tell us that all and every environmentalism is a metaphysics grounded on an unquestioned empiricism based upon an unsustainable distinction between nature and culture. The task of a deconstruction of the question of the environmental then might be a rethinking of the experience of the environment, and the environment as experience, as an encounter with an irreducible presence and perception of a phenomenality that is also an experience of the other, the wholly other, and of difference. It is this wholly other, the other that separates Derrida from Levinas, that must be attended to as the new materiality of an epoch of climate change and post-carbon economy. However, in this essay I will not be attending to the environmental effects as such of carbon. In a certain sense it is nonsense to speak of a post-carbon materiality since even if hydrocarbon fuels were to be outlawed tomorrow, carbon and its allotropes would remain, as they were in Plato’s time, the fourth most abundant element in the universe. Therefore, whenever I speak of a ‘post-carbon philosophy’ the question in hand does not strictly concern the depletion of a material itself. Rather, the task for thinking relates to the sort of world, being in the world, and thought concerning the world that an economy and culture based on the exploitation of hydrocarbons has given rise to, and what its prospects might be as this economy and culture inevitably weans itself off of petroleum and onto some other alternative energy source, while living with the inheritance of a century of intensive hydrocarbon use. In the end, the culture and economy of post-carbon-modernity might not look that different from the one that we occupy today. Undoubtedly, carbon-fuelled capital will not easily give up its privileges in favour of so-called sustainable living, and will seek to replace the risks of a carbon-based economy with those of a nuclear-based economy. The new materialities and bio-diversity challenges of the post-carbon age may quickly begin to look exactly the same as those of the present moment, the here and now proposing its own future. The shape of things to come is not the object of our speculation here. Rather, in this text I would like to consider the question of speculation itself. Philosophy will not name an alternative energy source, and this is a question that philosophy cannot answer and may not be a philosophical question. Philosophy, on the other hand, offers a model of crisis. It is at its most eloquent when talking about limits, ends and telos, and about the inability of theory or the humanities or the human sciences to ground themselves in institutions and actions, and concerning the incommensurability between what we still call “politics,” “ethics,” “economy,” and the global mutations today and the deconstruction of those mutations. If we are to understand what is most singular about our present time it will emerge from this philosophical reflection. However, the challenge for philosophy is not to draw down upon this template but to name and situate the most acute moment of the here and now as a crisis that distinguishes it from all previous crises. It is in understanding how the present crisis (of the globalization of neoliberalism, climate change, peak oil, and bio-diversity extinction), differs from all other crises (in the history of western colonialism, say) that philosophy might begin to think philosophically about this moment. Equally, there may well be no universal experience of this moment that would enable philosophy to act in a philosophical manner with respect to it. Given the diverse experiences of what it might mean for different parts of the world to be in this situation there may not be either a common horizon or discourse capable of offering an assured competence to frame and explain the crisis. In this sense, the philosophical concept of crisis that holds in the tradition after Valéry and Husserl would be faced with an inability to phenomenalize and ontologize a determinable universal experience of the crisis. Philosophy then sits on the cusp between being drawn to the crisis as the only means of determining it and having its own constitutive divisibility demonstrated by its inability to address the crisis through the redundancy of its own model of crisis. [2] It may be the case that the crisis of peak oil and simultaneous irreversible climate change is only a concentration and reiteration of previous liminal cases in the history of the exploitation of planetary resources by the west. For example, kerosene derived from coal and petroleum replaced whale oil as the source of illumination in America and Europe. The whaling industry had been in decline for a decade due to diminishing sperm whale populations and the destruction of the Northern whaling fleet during the civil war, when hydrocarbon illuminants were introduced out of necessity and innovation leading to gaslight homes and cities and a new phase of development in modernity. However, to say that our present crisis today is not unique does not mean that it is not singular. The task for thinking about the present crisis might be to understand the idea of the crisis today, the understanding that this is a crisis, that it corresponds to an idea or model of a crisis, provided for us by, say, philosophy and is theatricalized in contemporary discourse as such. The status of the idea that the world is in crisis as doxa might be one of the defining features of this crisis, the very thing that makes it like no other moment. The singularity of our present crisis might be defined by the resources spent in the mediatisation of the idea that the world is in crisis, by the competing political interests of the day (the advocates, the activists, the sceptics, the deniers, and the lobbyists) through all the channels of contemporary communication. On the one hand, within such rhetorical exchanges, the naming or denial of a crisis always serves a political interest. On the other hand, to identify an event as a crisis is always to ontologize it and to submit it to the model of the crisis that would explain it and domesticate it. Perhaps, we might say that today is not a crisis at all but rather the latest instance of a long history of planetary exploitation by capital, this instance being no more critical than any other in a long history. The naming of a crisis in the present works to mask that history and to neutralize it, giving it form and therefore a program and calculability. For either side of the present debate on climate change, say, to name only one of the threats to planetary life today, to name this process and event as a crisis would be to appropriate it for the present and for a metaphysics of presence. In giving the event of climate change a form and a certain calculability one has begun to neutralize the effects of its unknowable future and to erase the experience of alterity at the heart of an encounter with the wholly other. To name it as a crisis is to subject it to the temporality of “the crisis,” namely that it will one day come to an end and a state of normativity will be restored. One side of the debate would say that “normality” (whatever normal might mean on a planet that has weathered at least five major ice ages) can be resumed by cutting carbon emissions and introducing “sustainable” energy consumption. The other side says the present is in fact normal and no change in climate is in process. Either way, each side depends upon the idea of a normative climate derived from the idea that a change in climatic conditions would constitute a crisis for the human race. A crisis that would no longer allow mankind to run a system of resource exploitation that has sustained its development for the last two hundred years. In other words, what is at stake in the climate change debate is the very future of a world economy and the normative, or, ideal conditions for its operation. That is to say, the debate is predicated on an essentially conservative notion of how to sustain the ideal or normative. In fact, the event and singularity of climate change is constituted in the concept that it is already irreversible. The singularity of climate change as a crisis might be that it is not subject to the temporality of the crisis and that it might be a crisis without resolution and so demonstrate itself not to be a crisis at all but a constant state. In this sense crisis becomes a permanent condition or at least the resolution of this crisis is the construction of a new idea of the normative. In this way, climate change must change the very idea of a crisis by which we seek to determine it. At the same time, climate change becomes part of the latest chapter in the history of the idea of crisis and continues to be appropriated by it and subsumed to the model it undermines. On the issue of irreversible climate change and peak oil, I find myself to be surprisingly sceptical. Given that hydrocarbon consumption is already in decline and without fresh initiatives (although there are many mountain tops to be dynamited and much oil shale to be extracted yet) even the most optimistic forecasts suggest that petroleum consumption will have dwindled to almost nothing in my life time, why should we then be overly concerned by targets for climate emissions set for fifty years into the future? I do not doubt the damage that will be caused to, say, the polar ice caps during those fifty years and the resultant biodiversity loss. However, such targets seem to me to be aimed at ‘eking out’ the remains of carbon emission rather than addressing the more fundamental underlying causes of climate change. This “eking out” is also a transition phase for global capital as it acquires a new carbonless fuel. In fact, while it may take a million years for the planet to correct the damage inflicted in the next fifty, surely this realignment of the environment will take place in the absence of continued fossil fuel consumption. That is to say, that irreversible climate change is not necessarily irreversible, just that it is irreversible in the lifetime of global capital that as a planetary life form is something of a Johnny-come-lately. In this way, the discourse on climate change on all sides retains the vestiges of an irreducible humanism and the parochialism of western metaphysics. It would not be enough, it seems to me, for philosophy to accept the discourse and axiomatics of climate change advocates, even if it were possible to accept the science without reservation. Rather, this discourse in its present state is open to question, is fragile and perfectible, or even deconstructable (as Derrida reminds us of the abolitionist discourse on the death penalty [3] ) because it more often than not limits the idea of planetary life to the present conditions of a western-lead globalization and so inadvertently positions climate change as the latest accident to befall the western subject. In this way, climate change is the latest phase of the crisis of European humanity. Accordingly, it calls for a response from western humanity, one that will require the response of science, philosophy, and the human sciences (including economics). However, as an encounter with the wholly other of planetary life beyond the limits of western humanism, the event of climate change will transform, mutate, and challenge the protocols of European humanity’s intellectual apparatus. Climate change accordingly is a challenge to reason and so to philosophy as the custodian of western reason. If one were to question or attempt to exceed this as the locus of the present discourse of crisis, one might quickly find oneself in a position where terms like “crisis” and “irreversible” were no longer appropriate. As soon as we have determined a moment of crisis, with the temporality of a crisis and the calculability of a crisis, then we have entered the realm of economy. The response to a crisis is always economic in every sense of that word. Just as we bring a crisis “in house” by naming it as such, one must always ask what is the quickest and most efficient way of bringing a crisis to an end. Equally, in the final analysis, we are often told a planetary crisis will be a question of economics. However, just as one must question reason as the axiom of crisis, then we must question whether economics can continue to stand as a strictly determinable region of competence in the face of such a crisis. One would have to ask if economics can offer a competent realm of judgment, decision, and will to respond to the demands of the incalculable. It is not that economics does not have a response to the incalculable, but rather that a response directed here cannot be purely or strictly economical. This is where philosophy makes a return in the economy of crisis management. There is a clear and legible connection between what the oil industry calls “speculation” and the speculative philosophical enterprise. I would like to suggest that speculating for oil has been the basis of industrial modernity and the western economy for the last two hundred years (whether that oil was derived from the exploitation of hydrocarbons or whales is a moot point, even though the use of oil as a fuel dates, according to Herodotus, to Babylon 4,000 years ago). As that which fuels the engine of the economy, that which makes the economy as such possible, the search for oil is an investment in a venture with the hope of gain but with the risk of loss. The speculative structure of oil exploitation follows from and is now itself the basis for the structure of all investment in stock, property, and the fictional products of capital today. As with speculative philosophy, it involves the conjecture or theorization of a future event in the absence of the firm evidence of a present. It is this speculative structure that opens the future as a thinking of risk and as thinking as risk, that closely ties philosophy to the carbon economy. The question of the post-carbon economy is therefore clearly a matter of concern for philosophy. I have been careful to speak here from the beginning of a “post-carbon economy” (although we might also say “post-carbon-economies” since there will undoubtedly be more than one). While oil is a material thing, the stuff itself as it were, the price of oil is a question of economy, a matter of relation, and is irreducibly conceptual. My concern in this text is to think through the prospects for an economy and culture (if that is not a tautology) based upon the pricing of hydrocarbons as fuel. This question may come down to one that concerns the future of speculation itself, as much as it does a speculation on the future. I would like to offer a hypothesis here, even a speculation, apropos of today, that will need to be put at risk and tested, namely that whenever we speak of so-called “environmental catastrophe” the business of “financial crisis” is never far behind. In fact, a strong formulation of the hypothesis might be that the two are intimately connected, and that their relation always follows from a structure of speculation. In this sense, philosophy is what is put at risk and must put itself at risk by the conjuncture of the two.

Vote affirmative to endorse a radical disidentification with the subject. Far from lacking theory, politics is saturated by it – referential regimes of memory that authorize and legitimize destruction – only a disoccupation solves

Cohen 12 (Tom Cohen, Professor of Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies at University at Albany, State University of New York, Ph.D., from Yale University, 2012, “Introduction: Murmurations—“Climate Change” and the Defacement of Theory” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001)

The rapacious present places the hidden metaphoric levers of the eco or oikos in an unsustainable exponential curve, compounding megadebt upon itself, and consuming futures in what has been portrayed as a sort of psychotic trance—what Hillis Miller calls, in this volume, a suicidal “auto-co-immunity” track. [2] Yet the “Sovereign debt crisis” corresponds to a credibility crisis as well. The latter applies not only to the political classes of the post-democratic klepto-telecracies of the West but seems to taint the critical concepts, agendas, and terms received from twentieth-century itineraries that accompanied the last decades and that persist as currency. Far from opening beyond the propriety of the oikos theories of affect, living labor and critical legacies have doubled down on their investments, created guilds as reluctant as Wall St. to give up cognitive capital. All the while there is attention paid to ‘saving’ the humanities or a critical industry that might be extended for a while longer (as if with “sovereignty” itself). Bruno Latour [2010] presumes to call this recent and ongoing episode the “Modernist parenthesis” of thought. In his conjecture, the very pre-occupation with human on human histories, culturalism, archivism, and the institutions of power were complicit with a larger blind that, in his view, the ecological crisis belatedly discloses. [3] At the moment of writing it is common to point to the 2011 “occupy” movement, viral and cloud-like, as the Bartlebyesque counter to a totalization of the systems of this control. Bartleby has become the figure for a rejection of end-fixated production. Were one able to speak of an occupy movement applied to critical concepts and twentieth century derived idioms one might imagine a call to occupy critical theory and conceptual networks—but with what interruption of received programs (“Sovereign debt”), what alternative materialities, what purported “ethics” involving commodified futures (and the structure of debt), what mnemotechnics, and with resistance to what power, if it is the oikos itself, the metaphoric chimera and its capture of late anthropocene imaginaries that is at issue? This is one of the implications of what this volume terms telemorphosis, the intricacy by which referential regimes, memory, and reading, participate in these twenty-first century disclosures. The occupy motif, at the moment, sets itself against a totalization or experience of foreclosure—political, mediacratic, financial, cognitive. Various strategies appearing in this volume involve what could equally be called a disoccupy logic or meme. Such a logic of disoccupation assumes that the domain in question is already saturated, occupied in the militarist sense by a program that, unwittingly, persists in the acceleration of destruction and takeover. Critical thought of recent decades would have walked hand in hand with the current foreclosures. The explication of ecocatastrophic logics, accordingly, are not found in Foucault nor, surprisingly, Derrida. Timothy Morton’s Ecology without Nature is one such effort at disoccupation—seeking to void the two terms of the title, and in the process disrupt the “revised organicisms” of contemporary critical schools which, he argues, have managed to lapse into sophisticated pre-critical modes not unrelated to a more general inertia. The meme of disoccupation resonates, for instance, with what Robert Markley in this volume proposes as a practice of “disidentification,” and is implied by Timothy Clark’s tracking of a “derangement of scale” in the perpetual cognitive disjunctures that come up against the ecocatastrophic present. One would disoccupy the figure of subjectivity, refusing not only the comforting commodifications of “the other” in cultural theory, but also the later moral appeals to other redemptive beings, such as the animal (as Joanna Zylinska argues with regard to post-humanism and its “animal studies”). What might be disoccupied would be the metaphorics of the home, even where the latter would sustain itself today in cherished terms like trauma, affect, alterity, embodiment, or even culture. Yet a refusal of supposed redemptive ‘outsides’ to capitalism does not lead to a place of critical purity beyond the implied moralism of ‘occupy’ but the return of, and orientation to, a violence before which no model of sovereignty can be sustained. To imagine that one might disoccupy by refusing all the supposed redemptive ‘outsides’ to capitalism is not to find a place of critical purity beyond the moralism of ‘occupy.’ Occupation is never simply takeover and appropriation, but always involves destruction of what it claims. The viral migration of the “occupy” motif involves a premise of disoccupation covertly. In the present volume this takes different forms. If one is now beyond tipping points in a zone of irreversibility, what corresponds to this as a critical injunction? Catherine Malabou sets aside the entire way the figure of trauma and the “always already” has organized time. Claire Colebrook affirms, rather than accepting as tragic, extinction as a point of departure for thought, which can be used to work against the organicist ideologies of the present (such as sexual difference). Martin McQuillan shifts the referential spectrum of discourse to “other materialities” in the hypothesis of a post-carbon thought, while Robert Markley tracks the influx of geological times that displace human narrative matrices. Bernard Stiegler voids the biopolitical model, which he sees as exceeded by “the third limit of Capitalism” (when it impinges on the biosphere). From that point of excess he strategizes a counter-stroke to the capture of attention by telecratic circuits, initiating a noopolitics. Joana Zylinska disoccupies, to continue this motif, the covert model of soft “otherness” by which animal studies has invented itself as an anthropo-colonianism. Like post-humanism generally, Zylinska argues, animal studies sustains its subjectal hegemonies. Hillis Miller locates a source for the ecocatastrophic imaginary in the blind insistence of “organicist” models of reading that sustain the comforts of the oikos. Against this hermeneutics of security Miller posits an “ecotechnics” that is at once machinal and linguistically based (where language is not communicative, but literal and inscriptive in a manner exemplified by Kafka’s Odradek). Justin Read displaces any biopolitical model, again, by relinquishing trauma, the oikos, survival and interiorities of any manner, instead describing the circulation of data (or the “unicity”) from which the only remaining political gesture would be oriented to the ecocatrastrophic. Jason Groves shifts the referential screen from, again, a human-centered index to the viral textualism of (alien) species invasion, the global rewriting of bio-geographies. Mike Hill transitions to the alteration of atmospherics under the imaginary of climate war technologies in a new horizon of invisible wars (and wars on visibility), which today include not only nanotechnologies but also the “autogenic” turning of wars without discrete (national) enemies into suicidal rages against the “homeland”—a sort of, again, auto-occupation that is accelerating.

The resolution asks us to increase energy production, but leaves unquestioned the economic relations of the subject. Our interpretation of resolution demands production without economy, energy beyond carbon

McQuillan 12 (Martin McQuillan, Professor of Literary Theory and Cultural Analysis at Kingston University, 2012, “Notes Toward a Post-Carbon Philosophy” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001>)

Modern as the phenomenon might be and while philosophy has a great deal to say about “energy,” for example, if I might be allowed to paraphrase one of Derrida’s more familiar hyperboles: no philosopher as a philosopher has ever taken seriously the question of oil. Oil and carbon emission has a massive readability today and may define the most acute moment of the paroxysm that makes the present crisis like no other. This is not to say that there have not previously been bouts of financial uncertainty and environmental disasters precipitated by oil. In fact, the history of oil production might be nothing other than a chain of such instances. Rather, the most decisive index of the present moment is the toxic combination of climate change caused by carbon emission, the urgency for global capital of the risks of peak oil, and the central role played by oil trades in the global economy. We might go so far as to say on this later point that the entire practice of the western economy, that is the so-called global economy, depends upon oil. That is to say, that while the idea of the world market and of the “free exchange” of goods has a philosophical heritage running through early modern humanism and enlightenment thought, our present understanding of all exchange, debt, and faith runs through oil. To speak of a post-carbon economy might in fact be to say something quite radical, given that our present situation is so intensively related to the price of oil. To think an industrialized economy without the price of oil may on the one hand simply be a question of swapping one transcendental signifier for another, as gold was replaced by oil, so oil might be replaced by a trade in plutonium recycling. On the other hand, an opportunity exists here to understand economy as an experience of difference and as an encounter with the wholly other. This would require an other understanding of economy, one that was not dedicated to the utilization of wealth (what we now call a “restricted economy”) but one in which we began to understand the complexities of a sovereign economic term such as gold or oil, not in its loss of meaning but in relation to its possible loss of meaning (what Derrida, after Bataille, after Hegel calls a “general economy”). [5] In this sense, a “post-carbon economy,” presents an opportunity for a consideration of economy not to be limited to the circulation of strictly commercial values, the meaning and established value of objects such as gold, oil, and plutonium or so-called “carbon swaps.” Rather than a phenomenology of values as a restricted economy, we might begin to understand what exceeds the production, consumption, and destruction of value within the circuit of exchange. What Bataille might call “energy” beyond the energy of oil. This would not be a reserve of meaning within economy but an aneconomic writing of economy that is legible because its concepts move outside of the symmetrical exchanges from which they are identified and which according to a certain logic of recuperation they continue to occupy. This task of paleonymy as deconstruction is not one that philosophy will undertake on its own but one that will be played out in the irreversible mutations that take place in the global economy as a consequence of climate change, one which philosophy, opened by the materialism of nonphilosophy, will merely be at the forefront of reporting. It returns us to a familiar problem with which we began: having exhausted the oil reserve and the language of philosophy, the unfinished project of Modernity must continue to inscribe within its frames and language of intelligibility (i.e. philosophy) that which nevertheless exceeds the oppositions of concepts governed by its doxical logic. It is not that nineteenth and twentieth-century thought is incapable of responding to the new crisis of climate change but that climate change is a product of such thought as its latest episode and challenge. On the other hand, such a reading of economy seeks to understand or think what is unthinkable for philosophy, its economic blind spot. The reserves of deconstruction suggest writing in general as a slick economy without oil reserve. Derrida’s text on Bataille and economy was first published in L’arc in May 1967, well into de Gaulle’s diplomatic and economic attack on Bretton Woods and American expropriation of the European economy through dollar investment. His seminar on counterfeit money was given in the academic year 1977–78, between the two shocks in the price of oil in 1974 and 1979, when, as Muriel Spark puts it her 1976 novel The Takeover, “a complete mutation of our means of nourishment had already come into being where the concept of money and property were concerned, a complete mutation not merely to be defined as a collapse of the capitalist system, or a global recession, but a sea-change in the nature of reality as could not have been envisaged by Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud” (127). Spark’s fiction identifies here a “mutation” more significant than the local weather of a global recession or the collapse of western capitalism. She recognizes precisely the deportation of value itself from the symmetrical alternatives of exchange within a restricted economy of meaning. This is not a deconstruction brought about by philosophy but a critical climate change in the entire environment of meaning that shifts and re-settles of its own accord. For sure, capitalism survived the oil crisis of the early 1970s but as result there was an irreversible change and redistribution in the meaning of meaning itself. A clear line can be drawn from the substitution of gold for oil in 1971 to the credit bubble of 2007 and the transformations in capitalism (around futures and credit transfer derivatives) and the global economy (around the planetary production and consumption of natural resources). The question of the price of oil, and so of the petrodollar and the pricing of the global economy, must always be a question of the phenomenon of credit. The monetary crisis of 2007, the so-called “credit crunch,” was a matter of the credit-worthiness and the credibility of the value of assets. Oil futures and the future of oil are a question of credit and so of faith: belief in the conventional authority of the market and the credibility of the economy, economists, and politicians. The authority of the market is constituted by the accreditation, both in the literal sense of capitalization and creditworthiness in future exchanges but also in the sense of legitimation as an effect of belief or credulity. The authority of a fiction of economy such as a global financial and industrial system based on the future pricing of petroleum depends upon a planetary act of faith that far exceeds the credibility required to believe in climate change. It should not be surprising that the current financial crisis is a crisis of credit, a monetary crisis based upon the exchange of credit itself independent of physical assets, a dematerialization of money and value that requires a leap of faith and which in the absence of tangible proof tests that credibility to the limit: a sea change in the very idea of reality. Carbon is the element that oils faith in the global economy. It is inextricably bound to the history of a formation of a world that is essentially Abrahamic and European. It is over the question of the propriety of oil that the geopolitical now plays out all the contests between Europe and its others, and between the religions of the book. [6] The price of oil is the liquidity that fuels what Derrida called in 1994, “the world war” between all the people of the book, whose preeminent figure is “the appropriation of Jerusalem” (Spectres 52). Faith in the book and faith in oil are the two pillars of globalization and the temple of capitalism. In the complex history of the development of industrial capital and industrial Capitals, the city, polis and metropolis, oil powers the transformation of monetary forms from the pre-modern faith in metals to the belief in credit exchanges and credit-worthiness of the name as signature or future position. In this history of Modernity, oil is surely then closely linked to literature, not only as the energy source that fuels the illumination of literary production, but as the alternative, yet intimately related, site of an idea of credit, debt, and belief that runs across the modern period. Oil itself is not the stuff of literature, although certain exceptional cases might be identified. For example, Melville’s Moby Dick in 1851 is a text on the cusp of a transition from whale oil to hydrocarbons; modern literature would be unthinkable without the automobile, the aeroplane or gas lighting, from The Great Gatsby and Mrs. Dalloway to Sherlock Holmes. Zola’s Germinal is one of many texts on the subject of carbon extraction, and Dickens’ Hard Times is notable for its description of Coketown: better examples could no doubt be multiplied. On the other hand, film is the stuff of oil, and cinema is only a special case within the history of modern literature.

Instead of imagining a world governed by traditional notions of agency, we ask you to imagine climate change as something nonhuman, more than human: inhuman.

Cohen 12 (Tom Cohen, Professor of Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies at University at Albany, State University of New York, Ph.D., from Yale University, 2012, “Introduction: Murmurations—“Climate Change” and the Defacement of Theory” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001)

Given more, or different times, one might suggest that a sort of affirmative perspective emerges: First: the twentieth century preoccupation with human on human justice might be interrupted, with incompatible referentials arriving that would operate beyond archival memory and social history. Second, what we call the “political” would migrate from an exclusively social category (Aristotle), as it has been defined in relation to the polity, to a cognitive or epistemographic zone. Third, the era of the Book and its attendant nihilisms (alphabeticist monotheism) would appear as a dossier in the trajectory of telemorphic practices and memory regimes. Fourth, rather than segregate textual premises from the “real” world according to referential regimes and theotropes, the notion of text would intensify the sense of multiscalar and inhuman logics all operating in an open field that would be better referred to as an (a)biosemiosis, or nano-inscriptive process. Finally, in the “anthropocene era,” writing practices might be apprehended in their interweave with carbon and hydro-carbon accelerations, from a position beyond mourning and the automatisms of personification, or “identification.” What emerges in the above postulates is that a hermeneutic reflex and semantic ritual might be repositioned. We would not only locate reactive processes of meaning in the sphere of textual criticism but discern a broader tendency towards the foreclosure of forces of the future. A certain reading practice—or returning to the proper (or the other) from which one might draw credit—would be akin to cannibalizing a fantasmatic past for the sake of an unreal future. The financial system in its current vortices, in which global currency collapse is constantly threatened, resembles the “unsustainability” of resource consumption and global heating. And each echoes with the current cognitive trances—“unsustainable,” yet extending themselves credit (“quantitative easing”). To think that the modern question of power ought to be one of mourning and sovereignty—or of questioning how we lost an originary openness and fell into systemic closure, or how we failed to recognize some genuine others—precludes facing up to the fact that misrecognition, violent dispersal, decentred and inhuman forces have produced the mourned other and the sovereign as a lure that closes down confrontation with disappearing “futures.” At issue is not just moving “beyond” the fetishization of mourning (get over it!) but parrying this steel trap relapse that, as in the model of the organicism analyzed by Hillis Miller (“it’s everywhere”), fuels the acceleration. One returns to a putative domain of very small things: inscriptions, nano-settings, memory regimes, perceptual settings. The contemporary trends of today’s theory “after theory” often circle back to pre-critical premises. And they share a curious trait, aside from mourning 20th century master texts. Without disjuncture, the “new” model of networks and holistic circuitry that binds humanity and effortlessly traverses otherness and inter-species communications is the oddest replica of the previous organicisms whose suspension was the beginning of “theory” as such. [8] One is left with the impression that, as Žižek remonstrates of “the critical Left” during the ‘naughts [Žižek 2009], recent critical pre-occupations discretely collaborate with the accelerations we are witnessing today.

This demands that we deconstruct previous systems of ethics and justice – telemorphosis has made them proxies for infinite violence

Clark 12 (Timothy Clark is Professor of English at the University of Durham, 2012, “Scale” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001>)

Contra “Liberal Criticism” How then can a literary or cultural critic engage with the sudden sense that most given thought about literature and culture has been taking place on the wrong scale? The most controversial political effect of climate change may be its challenge to basic dominant assumptions about the nature and seeming self-evident value of “democracy” as the most enlightened way to conduct human affairs. David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith write: “colossal environmental problems, both existing and impending, have been accelerated by the freedoms and corruption of democracy and are unlikely to be solved by this system of governance” (15). The decisive target here is “liberal democracy” and the now dominant liberal tradition in political thought, i.e. the tradition that combines institutions of private property, market-based economics, individualistic-rights-based notions of personhood and the conception of the state as “existing to secure the freedom of individuals on a formally egalitarian basis” (Brown, Edgework 39). The liberal political tradition looking back to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke sees politics as essentially a matter of compacts between individuals for the unmolested use of individual property and exploitation of natural resources. Such concepts of right seem at first merely neutral: the rights that apply to a hundred people, or to a hundred million, could surely also apply to billions? Some questions about scale, however, emerge when it is remembered that the founding conceptions of the liberal tradition emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries “in low-population-density and low-technology societies, with seemingly unlimited access to land and other resources,” in a world, that is, that has now been consumed (Jamieson 148). On top of this, “[Locke] takes for granted that there will be enough, that the goodness of things provides enough so that taking by one or a group does not deprive others” (Ross 57). Structurally committed to a process of continuous economic growth, modern Western society effectively projected as its material condition an ever-expandable frontier of new land or resources. This impossible demand or assumption, long disguised by the free gift of fossil fuels, has now become visible and problematic. What Hans Jonas writes of “all traditional ethics” applies here: it “reckoned only with noncumulative behaviour” (7). Liberal notions of extending the status of the rights-bearing individual to more and more people are caught up in a complex and bewildering economy of violence. Climate change disrupts the scale at which one must think, skews categories of internal and external and resists inherited closed economies of accounting or explanation in a way even Jacques Derrida seems not to have suspected. Referring to Derrida’s well-known account in Specters of Marx (1993) of the “10 plagues” (81–3) held to be threatening the world, Tom Cohen notes the puzzling absence of any reference to environmental crisis, arguably the most deadly of all: [Derrida‘s] manoeuvre looks weak today, all ten being fairly standard and all human-to-human political miseries—from worklessness to weak international law. Today, as we “know,” the entire gameboard has been invisibly haunted by its own drive to auto-erase, or auto-eviscerate its non-anthropic premises. (qtd. in Wood 287) True, Derrida writes of incalculable responsibility and the conceptual and physical destabilization of borders, of national frontiers and the “at home.” His On Hospitality (2000) argues how the supposedly inviolable interiority of the home is already de-constituted, turned inside-out, by its multiple embeddings in public space, the state, the telephone line, monitored emails, etc., yet there is residual idealism in Derrida’s exclusive attention to systems of law and communication (61). The focus on the moment of decision in individual consciousness and its pathos (its ordeal of undecidablity, etc.) seems narrow and inadequate in a context in which things have now become overwhelmingly more political than people. Nothing in his work seems to allow for a situation in which it is not irrational to connect a patio heater in London immediately with the slow inundation of Tuvalu in the Pacific. Thus On Hospitality mentions TV, email and internet but not the central heating system, cooking appliances, washing machine or car (or, for that matter, the institution of private property itself, despite its crucial connection to Derrida’s topic of personal sovereignty). In effect, “All reality is politics, but not all politics is human” (Harman 89). Wendy Brown argues that Derrida’s “treatment of freedom reveals the hold of liberalism on his formulations of democracy,” (“Sovereign Hesitations” 127) that his arguments still work within an essentially liberal conception of politics as devising systems to enable the space of individuals’ seeming freedom to live as they choose, the challenge being to extend such politics beyond current borders and even beyond an exclusively human reference. [2] Reconfiguring a notion of the subject as openness to the other etc. instead of an autonomous self-presence, and attention to aporias of freedom/equality and conditional and unconditional hospitality, do not alter the basic terms of Derrida‘s commitment to a liberal progressivist tradition whose assumptions of scale are here at issue. In support of Brown’s point one can argue that a seeming blindness to nonhuman agency and to scale effects tends to preserve the political in On Hospitality as a factitiously separate sphere. Yet environmental issues enact a bewildering generalization of the political that makes Derrida’s focus on human norms, institutions, and decisions look like a kind of containment. His conception of the moment of decision as a negotiation with the undecidable is simultaneously both trivialized and magnified by scale effects in relation to such minutiae as turning a light on or deciding to buy a freezer. The later Derrida’s frontier questions of conditional or unconditional hospitality can seem foreclosed in scale, two-dimensional, for they ignore that ubiquitous border already contiguous with all other countries at the same time, a shared atmosphere. To live the hourly trivia of an affluent lifestyle in France is already to lurk as a destructive interloper in the living space of a farmer on the massive floodplains of Bangladesh. A nonhuman politics also raises questions about the dominant, liberal/progressive cultural politics of much mainstream professional literary criticism. The frequent method now is to read all issues as forms of cultural politics within an understanding of the text analogous to way the liberal tradition sees civic society generally, viz. as an arena for the contestation of individual or collective interests, rights or identity claims. For example, Group A is seen to achieve its self-celebratory image through its (implicit) denigration of Group B, while Group C is seen as itself “marginalized” by the way Group B always seems to identify it with Group A, instead of being a distinct set with its own claims...and so on. [3] Yet each, at the same time, is staking its own rights to air, water, space and material resources and to focus solely on the rights of the individual person or group elides the issue of the violence continually and problematically being waged against the earth itself, whose own agency is both taken for granted and disregarded. It is as if critics were still writing on a flat and passive earth of indefinite extension, not a round, active one whose furthest distance comes from behind to tap you uncomfortably on the shoulder. Modes of thinking and practice that may once have seemed justified, internally coherent, self-evident or progressive now need to be reassessed in terms of hidden exclusions, disguised costs, or as offering a merely imaginary or temporary closure. How this will work out in practice, however, is harder to predict—at least beyond the trivially obvious (“Well, I always thought Kerouac‘s On the Road was an irresponsible book, but now this!”). Perhaps then the most trenchant environmental and postcolonial criticism in relation to climate change would be one which took up the more meta-critical role of examining assumptions of scale in the individualist rhetoric of liberalism that still pervades a large body of given cultural and literary criticism. An ethic attending such work would also breach current notions of decorum, redrawing the seeming boundaries of privacy whereby, say, a critic’s professed views on history, religion, colonialism or ethics are all seen to belong in the realm of “public” controversy, seminars, papers and conferences while the resources sequestered to that person’s sole use remain a supposedly “private” matter, with a high salary and its attendant life-style still regarded, if at all, as a matter of prestige.

Absent a critique of mnemotechnics, any knowledge or skill we gain from this debate is forgotten – progressive politics has been consumed by the psychosis of corporate design

Cohen 12 (Tom Cohen, Professor of Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies at University at Albany, State University of New York, Ph.D., from Yale University, 2012, “Introduction: Murmurations—“Climate Change” and the Defacement of Theory” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/telemorphosis-theory-in-the-era-of-climate-change-vol-1.pdf?c=ohp;idno=10539563.0001.001)

Bruno Latour, as observed above, offered a curious fable in which he identifies what he calls the “Modernist parenthesis” as the default mode of thought that accompanied the disclosure of an ecocatastrophic horizon. The twentieth century focus on “critique” that would be transfixed with reading and rewriting its own chaotic histories would have walked hand in hand with the unfolding impasse to terrestrial life. Latour’s “Modernist parenthesis” includes the very project of critique and a pre-occupation with the past at the expense of addressing the past’s now exponentially accelerated consequences. Latour—whose speculation departs from a painfully Gaiesque reading of the film Avatar—proposes that, as part of any reset today, the term materiality ought to be retired as part of a faux binary. He also recommends jettisoning the term “future”, which he would replace with the ratcheted down and humbled term “prospects.” The label “Modernist parenthesis” is an intriguing trope. It resonates with a term like the “anthropocene” that can only, it implies, be pronounced in a future past tense which the speaker would inhabit. What might reading be if we were already looking back at our present, from a future that we cannot yet allow? Latour seems unaware to what degree he inscribes himself in this specular construction, both by his use of the retro-organicism of the Gaia metaphor and his premise, a signature of the “modernist” gameboard, of announcing a temporal break and new beginning, the revolutionary hypothesis of his imagined “parenthesis.” It is thus reluctantly that he finds his way back to a canonical twentieth century text, the “tired… trope” of Benjamin’s Angel of History to make his point: I want to argue that there might have been some misunderstanding, during the Modernist parenthesis, about the very direction of the flow of time. I have this strange fantasy that the modernist hero never actually looked toward the future but always to the past, the archaic past that he was fleeing in terror. […] I don’t wish to embrace Walter Benjamin’s tired “Angel of History” trope, but there is something right in the position he attributed to the angel: it looks backward and not ahead. “Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet.” But contrary to Benjamin’s interpretation, the Modern who, like the angel, is flying backward is actually not seeing the destruction; He is generating it in his flight since it occurs behind His back! It is only recently, by a sudden conversion, a metanoia of sorts, that He has suddenly realized how much catastrophe His development has left behind him. The ecological crisis is nothing but the sudden turning around of someone who had actually never before looked into the future, so busy was He extricating Himself from a horrible past. There is something Oedipal in this hero fleeing His past so fiercely that He cannot realize—except too late—that it is precisely His flight that has created the destruction He was trying to avoid in the first place. [Latour 2010: 485–6] This default appeal to Oedipus is perhaps too quick. Latour creatively misreads the “tired… trope” of an Angel who is, in Benjamin’s text, already something of a charlatan. The Angel is thoroughly impotent, aware of the scam of what the undead masses expect of him (to make them whole). “He” can’t give the undead masses and debris of history, turned toward him, what they want but lingers, as if wanting to, until he is simply torn away by what is called a “storm from the future.” This last angel is but the ragdoll of a certain angelicism—not just the costumed human face (with wings) imposed on the sign as messenger, here of no message, but the entire will to redemption narratives that his very form signifies. The text reads differently if one focuses on the word in Benjamin’s text, “storm,” which is repeated three times as the subject of three declarative sentences. It is a climactic term and subsequently indexed to what Thesis XVIII invokes as the aeons of organic life on earth within which human time appears as fractional seconds (an “anthropocene” perspective). Benjamin’s so-called Angel of History is in fact a vaudevillian figure and not the avatar of the hero, the materialist historiographer. He embodies and destroys both the angelicism of an utopist Marxian and the theotropes of a Cabbalist—the two specular idioms which the Theses fuses in order to cancel one another out. The description of the Angel is so abdicating, deceptive, and suicidal (one can imagine him diving for a cigarette as he looks at the masses) that it nullifies, in advance, the project of materialistic historiography. It also cancels any “weak messianism”—or any messianism whatsoever. The Angel is shown as a con, held to his post by his expectant readership who still wants to be made whole. It will never be clear whether the Angel only thinks this is what is wanted of him, or if the undead masses think he wants them to want this. He is the last trace of anthropopism, dolled up as a human figure to mediate chance. When he is torn away by the “storm” he removes the anthropo-narcissm of angelicism, the lure of giving matter a human form, face and, in this case, betraying bird wings. He is the last personification of a human face plastered on an imaginary other, already a wire-framed incandescent in Klee’s graphic deconstruction. He mimes and is dismissed as the sort of “weak messianism” that Benjamin elsewhere pretends to evoke—and which Derrida will return to, and try to use to keep a rhetoric of the future open (the trope of an impossible “democracy to come”). In this way, the Derrida of Specters of Marx regresses from Benjamin’s destructive project by restituting the phrase “weak messianism.” Derrida’s omission of ecocatastrophic logics from his otherwise compendious agenda—for instance, nowhere to be found in Specters’ “ten plagues” of the new world order—echoes elsewhere in an archival limit he seemed to require for “deconstruction” to rhetorically stage itself. It is not that Benjamin’s Angel trope is about fixation on the past—as archive, trace, histories of power, identity formations, narratives of justice, inscriptions—and hence ritual or time management. It is that “He” thinks that’s what his readers seek in him, and he both gestures toward wanting to oblige (with, say, weak messianism?) and effectively gets out of dodge. Benjamin’s Angel is given to us as a sort of con: knowing what his readership needs and hires him for (since “He” is the messenger of no revelation and reports to no god, is nothing but sign itself), He wants to help but is violently blown away. This lure of redemptive history is about angelicism tout court, its reflex or façade, the compulsion to reconstitute and to be reassured (even sanctified). The trompe l’oeil points not only to where this faux Angel is in costume as the last anthropomorphic form and face. (He looks human, is more or less male traditionally). It also points to the disappearance of the pretended mediation of an otherwise void sign (angel as messenger, as hermeneut). It gives the lie to a certain pretense to ethics, and to cognitive moralisms, and indicates a participation of angelicism in a more radical evil of which it is, adamantly, structurally, and violently unaware. The impulse toward angelicism pervades the recycling of twentieth century critical idioms in sophisticated variations. And this systemic relapse, like the Nachkonstruction of an oikos whose non-existence would accelerate its militarized defense, itself appears to further a suicidal arc. This new angelicism, like what Timothy Morton [2007] calls “revised organicisms,” merits suspicion. It is opportunistic to note where various critical traditions of return and redemption mingle. In a conversation between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt on “love” as a political agency at a conference titled “On the Commons; or, Believing-Feeling-Acting Together” we can read yet one more variant of an appeal to an angel that would make us and our past whole. Let us ignore that the commons in question for Hardt and Berlant is not water, oil, or food but the “transformative” zone of a new social “relationality” of liberal souls. “Love” here retains the soft debris and promise of a Christological meme. If for Hardt love “makes central the role of affect within the political sphere,” for Berlant a more aggressive claim erupts: Another way to think about your metaphor, Michael, is that in order to make a muscle you have to rip your tendons. I often talk about love as one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become different. And so it’s like change without trauma, but it’s not change without instability. It’s change without guarantees, without knowing what the other side of it is, because it’s entering into relationality. The thing I like about love as a concept for the possibility of the social, is that love always means non-sovereignty. Love is always about violating your own attachment to your intentionality, without being anti-intentional. [Davis and Sarlin 2011] Perhaps the metaphorical faux pas about “tendons” being ripped is a clue to the skeletal argument (this is not, literally not, the way to build muscle). What one witnesses is the effect of doubling down in the idiom of commitment (“change without trauma”?), a closing off, as academics of a certain age and temperament murmur, narcissistically, about affect. One has found a new name for the oscillation that retains a sovereignty of intentionality under a shifted algorithm: “Love is always about violating your own attachment to your intentionality, without being anti-intentional.” Sometimes, as we hear, it’s just not about us, even where self-love is called the commons and projects a socio-union, or jouissance, beyond the confines of a dubious “collective” individualism. Perhaps this is one marker of an end of a cycle, this fusion of critical and culturalist idioms, returning to a redeeming origin—this time as “farce.” This sort of eddy appears as the comfort spa for what could be called academic theory’s “Lehman moment.” 5. What is interesting in the horizons converging at present is not how a certain irreversibility impacts or is excluded still by telecracies and cognitive regimes. Nor is the main point of interest how sophisticated critical agendas have discretely served an agenda of institutional inertia—especially in the guise of critique. What is interesting is not the shape this will take, the variable catastrophes that are calculable or envisioned. What should be interesting is a logic of foreclosure or psychosis that has become, in part, normatized, accommodated or confirmed by corporate media. [9] This psychosis takes the form of excluding, occluding, or denying what is fully in the open and palpable, whether in science or before one’s eyes. Latour assumes that a “Modernist parenthesis” erred by its assiduous focus on rereading the past otherwise, but he misses the target of Benjamin’s cartoon. It is not attention to the past but rather angelicism that constitutes a violent hermeneutic relapse. Perhaps an example of Latour’s paralyzing ‘parenthesis’ would be Derrida’s injunction against thinking the “future” in order to keep open the incalculable and the “to come.” In fact, the current plunge in economic and societal “prospects”—lost “sovereignty,” debt enslavement, banker occupation, collapse of reserves, and so on—is not premised on an undue focus on the past but is all about alternative time-lines. In this respect Latour’s “prospects” run into the same capture of futures that occurs in the market, whether manipulated from above to defer reckoning (the “too big to fail” logic) or bet against. Calculations about future events, the forward narratives that flood media and alternative journalism, suggest a time in which the commodification of the “past” has flipped forward—marking both past and future as fantasmatic projections. One is not, so to speak, nor have we been, outside of “literary” constructions, least of all when we say something like system or reserves. What is called the market, now technically rogue in the sense that it serves as a façade of manipulations to play for time, is all about bets on future circumstance. Expanded to commodified futures and derivatives, and credit default swaps; wired through ingenious and self-imploding “financial instruments”—said market parallels the global despoilment of future reserves and times (generations). It would be indulgent to run through variations of this. Some are familiar: the consolidation of a new form of totalitarianism and internal security apparatuses; new climate war technologies (applied internally) testing the “full spectrum dominance” protocols that the Pentagon retains as its post-imperial template (which Mike Hill explores in this volume). Some are becoming visible: untimed prognoses of biospheric collapse (marine food chains), extreme weather disasters (mega-drought, flooding, fracking induced quakes). Others hover at the edge of recognizability: mass extinction events, the mathematics of global population “culling.” These nonetheless, like hydo-carbons and oil itself, literally shape visibility and invisibility—no oil, no hyper-industrial techno-culture, no photography as we know it, no cinema, no global transport. Is there an imperative, as Martin McQuillan suggests, to rethink the histories of writing and cognition in relation to carbon and hydrocarbon culture explicity—and to do so not only in relation to human mnemo-technologies? When Claire Colebrook converts extinction from a tragic taboo to an affirmative perspective she deflates the semantic boundedness that any angelicism has always sought to save. The problem is not that the past draws human narcissism toward it in the latter’s critical revisionism and deconstructions; the problem is that the more active “other temporalities” intervene, the more the artefacted present appears spellbound.